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ABSTRACT

One of the most persistent challenges facing schools is how to respond to diversity as reflected in student race, gender, ethnicity, language, social class, and ability. This paper presents findings of a study that investigated how eight elementary schools undergoing restructuring responded academically to student diversity and how a school's normative beliefs and structural characteristics influenced its responses. Data are from the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools' school-restructuring study. Methods included observation of six teachers at each school and interviews with teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and representatives of external agencies. The results suggest that even though elementary schools try to balance between differentiation and the provision of common experiences as an academic response to student diversity, the balance often tilts in one or another direction. Moreover, the balance will tilt to create a dominant response that supports providing common experiences to all students when the school adopts pedagogical practices that, to some extent, depart from conventional practice; when school staff share values about pedagogy and about the student as a whole person; when the school's leadership supports those values; and when the school engages in capacity-building efforts to address student diversity among its regular education programs. The findings also suggest that schools that lack any of these conditions or that are focused on what makes students different from one another are likely to tilt in the direction of providing programs that differentiate student experiences. Three tables are included. (Contains 33 references.) (LMI)

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FINAL DELIVERABLE TO OERI

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# THE RESPONSE TO STUDENT DIVERSITY IN RESTRUCTURED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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# THE RESPONSE TO STUDENT DIVERSITY IN RESTRUCTURED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how eight restructured elementary schools responded academically to student diversity and the relationship of a school's normative beliefs and structural characteristics to its responses. Our results suggest that, even though elementary schools try to balance between differentiation and the provision of common experiences as an academic response to student diversity, the balance often tilts in one or another direction. Moreover, the balance will tilt to create a dominant response that supports providing common experiences to all students when the school adopts pedagogical practices that, to some extent, depart from conventional practice, when school staff share values about pedagogy and about the student as a whole person, when the school's leadership supports those values, and when the school engages in capacity-building efforts to address student diversity among its regular education programs. Our results further suggest that schools that lack any of these conditions or that are focused on what makes students different from one another are likely to tilt in the direction of providing programs which differentiate student experiences.

# THE RESPONSE TO STUDENT DIVERSITY IN RESTRUCTURED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how restructured[1] elementary schools addressed issues involving student diversity. Specifically, we were interested in studying how the schools responded academically to those issues, and the relationship of a school's normative beliefs and structural characteristics to its responses.

## RESPONDING TO STUDENT DIVERSITY

One of the most persistent challenges facing schools is how to respond to diversity as reflected in student race, gender, ethnicity, language, social class, and ability (Grubb, 1995). Of course, *individual* students vary in how they experience school and good teachers adapt their instruction to meet the educational interests and needs of each individual student. On the other hand, diversity is linked to students' memberships in demographic groups (Phelan & Davidson, 1993). Schools may enroll individuals; but also, they enroll students who belong to specific groups which—even if a bit fuzzy along the edges (Waters, 1995)—are nonetheless identifiable and wherein said membership has social consequences (Banks & Banks, 1995).

By responses to diversity, we mean those structures which schools establish and those actions which they take in order to deal with the existence of identifiable groups of students and to make their programs relevant for those groups. Historical responses to student diversity have included the denial of educational opportunity to African Americans and Hispanics (Darling-Hammond, 1995) and the creation of specialized programs to "socialize" American Indian and immigrant students to society's dominant cultural norms (Andersson & Boyer, 1978; Crawford,

1992; Grubb, 1995; Lomawaima, 1995; Olnek, 1995) or to prepare low-income and female students for their roles in life (Cordasco, 1976; Crawford, 1992; Knapp & Wolverton, 1995). Though critics often argue that themes from the past can often be found in present-day responses to student diversity, current responses include between-class or in-class ability grouping, tracking, and categorical programs—such as Chapter 1, bilingual education, and English as a second language. Multicultural curricula, Afro-centric programs, specialty classes for African American males, and all-girls mathematics classes are additional ways by which present-day schools respond to student diversity.

We framed this study by setting our lens at the level of the school, as opposed to the classroom, program, or schooling writ large. Secondly, we glossed over programmatic distinctions and considered the schools' responses to student diversity in terms of whether those responses would result in students having a common set or a differentiated set of experiences along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, language, and/or ability. And finally, we purposefully studied a specialized sample of schools—restructured elementary schools.

**The School as the Site**

Research and analyses at the intersection of schooling and student diversity have often focused on the teacher and classroom processes; the nature, purposes, and effects of categorical programs; or how schooling, as a system, has responded (to failed to respond) to student diversity (for examples, see Banks & Banks, 1995; Cohen, 1994; Flaxman & Passow, 1995; Knapp and Associates, 1995; Nieto, 1992; Phelan & Davidson, 1993; Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey, & Pasta, 1991). In a study that is quite similar to ours, Berman, McLaughlin, McLeod, Minicucci, Nelson, and Woodworth (1995) studied how eight "exemplary sites" (page E-2) had created programs to

provide high-quality instruction for their limited English proficient student populations. Schools either created specialized programs (which varied in how fully they been integrated into the school's overall functioning), they created something akin to a school within a school; or the entire school had restructured for its LEP students population.

In contrast Berman et al.'s focus on school-based programs for a special population of students, this study inquires about how the school *as a unit* addresses the many dimensions of diversity *simultaneously*. While specific categories of diversity may have salience in specific settings, schools are expected to address all the forms of diversity that they encounter. One might wonder, for instance, How did the schools studied by Berman et al. balance their justifiable concerns for students' language with issues of gender, social class, and race?

In placing the focus of this study at the school, we shifted attention away from specific programs (important as they are) to the school as an entity. That is, we inquired about how the school—taken as a whole—responded to diversity across its programs and its other actions, and the school's dominant beliefs and organizational features which supported its overall response.

**Commonality and Differentiation of Student Experiences as Academic Responses to Student Diversity**

Many studies of schools' academic responses to student diversity have focused on programs and other structural responses—for instance, tracking, ability grouping, heterogeneous grouping, pull-out categorical programs, the creation of specialized classes for specific populations of students, and the like (for examples, see Cohen, 1994; or Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992). We found similar programs and actions. However, in order to make sense of that variety, we glossed over some important distinctions among programs and focused on whether

the programs would provide groups of students with differentiated versus common experiences.[2]

Natriello (1994) has noted that schools, like all social groups, contain "processes that unite the members and promote the integrity of the group and processes that divide the members and strain the group form" (p. 111). The outcomes of Natriello's processes are related to group affiliation; hence, he focused on common rituals, communication among students and their teachers, extracurricular activities, shared values, and a common core curriculum as bringing people within the school together. Since our outcomes are related to students' academic experiences, our focus was more on how schools act to create and implement structures to ensure that students receive common educational experiences as in, for instance, full inclusion programs for special-needs students, the provision of categorical program services within regular classroom settings, doing away with ability grouping and/or tracking, heterogeneous grouping in classes, the administration of common assessments for specific purposes, and the provision of a core common curriculum.

Many processes described by Natriello (1994) as processes that pull people apart within the school and many described by Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1995) as responses to student diversity are similar to how we thought of school responses that result in the differentiation of students' academic experiences: ability grouping, tracking, and compensatory pull-out programs (referred to by Pallas et al. as "disability grouping" due to remedial nature of such programs). We omitted age and interest grouping, two forms of differentiation which Natriello and Pallas et al. included, since age and interest do not have the same salience in debates about education and student diversity as do race, gender, social class, ethnicity, language, and ability.

While differentiation and commonality represent seemingly antithetical poles as

responses to student diversity, the location of a program at one or the other pole depends on how that program is implemented in each school's context. For instance, if a school provides a specific kind of curriculum or program to all of its students (for example, Afro-centric or multicultural curricula, or a two-way bilingual-education program), or if it is designed for a specific kind of student population (for instance, an all female school), then the programs in question support the provision of common student experiences in that school. On the other, if the same curriculum or program is provided to a subset of students (for instance, a girl-friendly mathematics class), then the school is providing differentiated student experiences.[3]

As Natriello (1994) and Pallas et al. (1995) have noted, no school will rigidly engage in a single response pattern to student diversity; as indeed, no business or other organization would be expected to respond rigidly to a diverse clientele. It was a given that both kinds of responses would be found—sometimes seeming to work at odds with each other and other times in a more sensible balance—within the study's schools. On the other hand, we hypothesized that schools would engage in a *dominant* response that would be more closely aligned with one or the other pole. By a dominant response, we mean that the school exhibited a press in the direction of the structures supporting either differentiation or commonality. As we probed for the intentions underlying the pattern of a school's actions, we inferred that school's dominant response to student diversity.

## Restructured Schools

School restructuring has been used to address a host of issues around curriculum and teaching reform, student diversity and achievement, teachers' professional development, governance and accountability systems, among others (Berman et al., 1995; Chubb & Moe, 1990;

Comer, 1988; Elmore & Associates, 1990; Flaxman & Passow, 1995; Newmann & Associates, in press; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Many calls for improved schooling for diverse student populations also incorporate calls for student access to instruction that is focused on thinking skills, reasoning, relevance to students' home and cultural backgrounds as well as to the worlds in which they live (Atwater, Radzik-Marsh, & Strutchens, 1994; Cohen, 1994; Nieto, 1992; Knapp and Associates, 1995; Newmann & Associates, in press; Phelan & Davidson, 1993; Secada, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 1988). By studying a sample of restructured elementary schools which were, at least rhetorically, committed to new forms of pedagogical practices and to addressing issues of student diversity, we hoped to increase the chances of finding schools that were actually responding to these issues. By studying schools where issues of pedagogy and diversity are salient, we hoped that our efforts could be used to construct a framework which could then applied in other school settings.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on an analysis of data from the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools' school restructuring study (SRS) (Newmann and Associates, in press; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

### Description of the Schools

The eight elementary schools that were visited as part of the SRS served as the cases for this study (see Table 1, all names are fictitious). These schools departed from typical organizational characteristics of schools along four dimensions—student experiences, teachers' professional work lives, governance, and linkages to external agencies—which the center had operationalized through a 39-item survey. These public schools had been selected as part of a

national search and were located, primarily, in large urban areas (Berends & King, 1992, provide a more detailed description of the larger sample).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Since all eight schools were in the process of restructuring, they were very highly regarded and had much visibility within their respective districts. District personnel would refer visitors and personnel from other schools to these schools. Teachers from this sample often served on district committees and were highly regarded for their work at their respective schools. Beyond special recognition, these schools could petition for and would often get waivers or special considerations in the interpretation of district, state, or even federal requirements and guidelines. Additionally, while none of these elementary schools had a funding surplus and they had very real concerns about continued funding for their efforts, all eight schools had enough money for the then-current year's efforts; and historically, they had access to special pools of money that assisted them in their work.

Five of the eight schools—Ashley, Careen, Eldorado, Falls River, and Lamar—were also magnet schools. Ashley served as a combined neighborhood-magnet school, where it drew students from a cluster of 3 attendance centers (including its own). Ashley's magnet focus was a self-contained gifted and talented track. Careen also served the local neighborhood and would draw students from throughout its district to participate in a specialized, real-world, project-driven curriculum. Eldorado operated as a combined local neighborhood-magnet school, where it would draw students to its two-way school-wide bilingual education program from throughout the district. Falls River offered full inclusion for ***all*** students, regardless of category. In theory, Falls River drew students from the neighborhood and the rest of the district; in practice, 98% of

its students came from the local attendance area. Lamar was the only pure magnet school of the five, drawing all its students from throughout the district. Lamar offered a thematic, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based curriculum that included access to some very impressive technology. The five schools' magnet focus also provided them with additional visibility and special funding opportunities.

Table 1 provides a by-school breakdown of each school's student demographic make-up. On average, these elementary schools enrolled 630 students; 38% were white; 16%, African American; and 42%, Hispanic. On average, 52% of the students were on free or reduced lunch. In other words, there was plenty of diversity for the schools to be concerned about.

**Data Gathering and Coding**

Data for each school were gathered during two, one-week, 3-person visits to each school. During that time, each site-visit team conducted two observations, for each of 6 teachers (3 mathematics and 3 social studies teachers) in grades 4, 5, or combined 4/5. Each site-visit team interviewed these 6 teachers, an additional 6 to 12 teachers who provided leadership or played key roles in the school's restructuring efforts, the school's principal, district personnel who could provide insights about the school, parents and community representatives, as well as representatives of external agencies that were supporting the school's efforts.

Data for this particular study were taken from two sources. The first was a detailed, comprehensive report written by each site-visit team. Each report had sections devoted to authentic pedagogy, equity, empowerment and governance, community within the school, teachers' and staff opportunities for reflective conversations, assessment and accountability, use of community resources, and influences of external agencies. The second data source was each

team's field notes for interviews that were conducted with school staff and with others at the site. Field notes consisted of bulleted ideas of an interviewer's conversations with an informant, the interviewer's observations with some supporting quotes from the interviewee, or transcriptions of an entire taped interview.

We coded the qualitative data looking for evidence concerning actions taken in response to student diversity by individuals, groups within the school, or the school as a whole; and for evidence concerning the school's normative beliefs about student diversity. We coded how individuals would talk about their students (for example, low-achieving, poor, single-parent, family substance abuse, African American, Hispanic, limited English proficient, gifted) and whether a person had some overarching conception of what needed to be done to meet the academic (and other) needs of her or his diverse student populations. We coded data based on how the organizational features of the school supported or impeded individual and collective efforts to help students, for examples of conflicting approaches, and how conflicts were resolved, if at all. Finally, we coded for external forces and actors (parents, community, district, state) who could influence the school's response to the diversity among its students.

We began the coding of data with an initial set of hierarchically organized, external codes. The hierarchy was three levels deep; passages coded at one level were also coded at the superordinate levels. As we confronted data that could not be unambiguously coded, we added new categories, collapsed some categories into new ones, and in a few cases, deleted categories. When the data could be coded, relatively unambiguously and with some degree of reliability, we continued coding all of the data.

**Data Analyses**

For each of the interviewers' notes, we generated reports about the school based on our codes and sub-codes. Also, we read each team report as providing added context for our interpretations of the field notes. Because each team report was the collaborative creation of the site-visit team, had been revised at least three times after undergoing extensive review and discussion by team and non-team reviewers, and was focused on finding evidence to support the team's assertions, we gave the most weight to the team reports in our own data analyses.

We looked for evidence—in both, the team reports and the field notes—concerning the existence of dominant responses to student diversity and for the organizational supports for those responses. If we thought that we had found such evidence, we tried to falsify it by a careful re-reading of the team report and the coded interviews. We met as a team to discuss the individual cases and to arrive at consensus about each school. This method of data analysis results in a set of iterative, ever-evolving, provisional conclusions; we stopped when we had reached stability and a degree of consensus as to the reliability and validity of our efforts.

## RESULTS

This section has been organized around the schools' dominant responses to diversity and the school's normative beliefs and values involving student diversity and their organizational features which supported (or impeded) the maintenance and creation of a dominant response to student diversity.

### Reactions to Student Diversity: Balancing Differentiation with Commonality

As can be seen by even a cursory reading of Table 2, all 8 schools combined their academic responses to student diversity in ways that did both: provided common student experiences and differentiated student experiences. In schools that were committed—at least

rhetorically—to all students having a common set of experiences or meeting the same standards, there is differentiation. For example, in Humboldt Elementary School, children were assigned to classes and within classes heterogeneously (a push towards commonality). But some teachers followed their students for 2 to 3 years resulting in some groups of students receiving greater continuity in their educational programs relative to others (differentiation). Eldorado Elementary School tried to develop full bilingual competence among all its students through an ambitious two-way bilingual program (commonality). Yet first, it would teach children how to read in their dominant language—English or Spanish (differentiation). Falls River Elementary School had a far-reaching full-inclusion program (commonality). Yet, it maintained a single self-contained class for primary special-needs students and two of its 4th-5th grade teams, who ironically are among the school's strongest proponents for full inclusion, enroll disproportionate numbers of African American and special needs children, respectively.[4]

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Similarly, differentiation was tempered by some (even if minimal) efforts to ensure a common core of student experiences. For instance, Winema Elementary School's response to students diversity was to create more and more differentiated programs, including self-contained classes for at-risk students, pull-out programs for gifted and talented and other special needs students, homogenous-ability reading groups, efforts to match students with teachers, and individualized instruction. Yet a thinking-skills curriculum was to be used across the school, in the alternative as well as the regular classrooms. This curriculum was supposed to ensure that students had some common experiences. By state law, Ashley Elementary School had to operate a self-contained track for gifted and talented students. The school compensated the regular track

for the state's unequal resource allocation to its gifted program and the school's cross-grade study groups focused on common problems across tracks. The site visit team's observations of instruction supported Ashley's teachers' claims that ***all*** students received high quality instruction, regardless of track.

A second feature of these schools' reactions to student diversity was the wide variety of possible responses (see Table 2). Yet regardless this variability, both within and across schools, we could still categorize 7 of the 8 schools' academic responses to student diversity as tending towards providing either common student experiences or differentiated student experiences. Recall that by common student experiences, we are referring to the school's having high expectations, providing a common curriculum, ensuring high quality instruction, and engaging in common assessment practices—all across diverse student populations. Of course, there will be by-teacher variation, but that variation should be more-or-less randomly spread out among different student populations. When we refer to differentiation, we mean that there are differences in the above practices and that these can be related to student demographic characteristics.

**Common Student Experiences**

Ashley, Careen Falls River, Eldorado, and Humboldt, tended to respond to student diversity by providing common experiences. Humboldt's main responses were the heterogenous grouping of students (between and within classroom) and in-class provision of support services (such as English as a second language). Eldorado provided a two-way, alternate day bilingual program and in-class support services. Careen responded to student diversity through its thematic, project driven curriculum and expectation that individual teachers would adapt their

instruction to students. Though there were some notable exceptions; Falls River's primary response to student diversity was its full inclusion program whereby bilingual, Chapter 1, and most special-needs students received instructional support in regular classroom settings.

Ashley provides an interesting case that illustrates how a school's formal structures need not fully determine that school's response to diversity. Ashley's defining structure for shaping student experiences was its self-contained gifted and talented program which exerted a strong pull towards differentiating student experiences. Ninety-seven percent of the gifted program's students were white and its student-teacher ratio was in the mid-to-high teens; in contrast, the school's regular program enrolled a 55% white student population and has a student-teacher ratio in the mid-20s. Ashley's staff did not explicitly discuss their school's gifted and talented program, in part for fear that such discussions might do more harm than good (staff who taught in the gifted program were somewhat defensive about it) and because they felt that there was nothing they could do about it. Yet the school did, in fact, "do something" about its gifted program. It provided the regular program with additional resources and ensured that staff got equal opportunity to participate in professional development opportunities; students were mixed across both programs for non-academic activities as much as possible; and CORS research site-visit teams found that both programs provided equally high-quality instruction to their students. Hence, while the school's structure pulled it in the direction of differentiation of student experiences, the school's *dominant academic response to diversity* was to provide its students with common experiences.

It is interesting to note that Ashley, Careen, Falls River, and Eldorado were magnet schools whose mission included the local neighborhood. At Falls River, Eldorado, and

Humboldt could be found staff who expressed concerns about their schools' role in the out-of-school lives and future opportunities of their students. While Ashley's staff did not express the same ideas about later-life opportunity for their students, they did express a strongly-felt need to do whatever was necessary to ensure that all students in the school would succeed. Ashley, Falls River, Eldorado, and Humboldt were located in high poverty areas of their respective school districts. Finally, at Ashley, Careen, Eldorado, and Humboldt could be found a strong faculty commitment to curricula that can be described as progressive: i.e., relevant, thematic, project driven.

**Differentiated Student Experiences**

Sumpter and Winema were the two schools whose dominant response to student diversity was to provide differentiated experiences. Sumpter's responses included a self-contained bilingual classroom at each grade and many specialized programs based on teacher expertise and interest. Indeed, teachers at Sumpter were encouraged to develop a wide range of specialized skills. Students would then be matched to their teachers based on the student's learning style and the teacher's area(s) of specialization. Winema provided individualized programs, alternative education classes, a broad range of pull-out programs, homogenous reading groups within the classroom, and placement of students with teachers who "seem to work well with that sort of student." Both, Sumpter and Winema, stressed matching students to differentiated programs and to teachers who could work with them.

**Balance**

Lamar provided a perplexing exception to our effort at determining a school's dominant response. On the one hand, Lamar tended strongly towards differentiating student experiences

through teachers' counseling of some parents to remove from the school children who could not work independently, multiple mixed-grade student clusters, large pull-out gifted program, small pull-out ESL and special education programs, and individualization of instruction. On the other hand, the school's thematic inquiry-based curriculum and heterogenous assignment of students to clusters provided for student experiences that should have been, at least in theory, unrelated to student demographic background and hence in the direction of providing common experiences.

## The Schools' Organizational Features

Why do schools have dominant responses? Each school responded to student diversity by balancing differentiation and providing common experiences for students. Also, each school responded to its own unique equity concerns and external forces (such as parents) which would pressure it to respond to issues of student diversity.

On the other hand, Ashley could have accepted its fate. Its teachers need not have actively ameliorated the differentiation of student experiences that resulted from its gifted program. Nor for that matter, is there any *a priori* reason why a school like Humboldt should engage in heterogeneous grouping, both between and within classes. How a school ultimately responds to student diversity falls within its purview. In an effort to understand why schools respond as they do, we need to look at that school's normative values and beliefs as they relate to student diversity and also at the structural features which support their responses. Our findings are summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

### Normative Values and Beliefs

In our sample, differences between whether schools tended towards common or

differentiating student experiences were related to whether a school had an overarching commitment to particular forms of pedagogy and the nature of its shared beliefs about its student populations.

**Schools that Tended Towards Common Student Experiences.** Ashley, Careen, Eldorado, and Humboldt shared strong commitments to progressive and ambitious forms of pedagogy—that is, thematic, cross-disciplinary, project-oriented and/or relevant curricula; instruction focused on the student as learner; and non-traditional assessment practices. Teachers at all four schools believed that all students could engage in the activities called for by such pedagogical practices. Indeed, some teachers at Careen, Eldorado, and Humboldt explicitly stated that ambitious pedagogy was the best for most, if not for all students.

Teachers at all five schools, in varying degrees, expressed commitments to accepting and caring for the whole child. Teachers spoke about the child's emotional, physical, social, cultural, and academic development and how they—as a school and individually—tried to attend to all of those facets in their students. At Eldorado and Humboldt, there were strongly political overtones to this commitment wherein, beyond accepting where the child was at, teachers also referred to the children's out-of-school lives and to their concerns that the school should prepare its students to deal with the somewhat oppressive world that they lived in and for their futures in that world.

The case of Falls River helps to confirm the importance of an overarching vision of pedagogy that applies to all students and of how beliefs about students interact. The school's previous principal—who had engineered the school's shift to full inclusion—was firmly committed to whole language instruction. Yet the Falls River staff did not evidence a similar commitment either to whole language or other, progressive forms of pedagogy at the time of the

CORS site visit. Also, some primary-grades faculty opposed full inclusion on the grounds that having the most in-need children in their classrooms would make it very difficult for them to teach the rest of the class. Moreover, two teams who were among full inclusion's strongest proponents, also held strong beliefs about the needs of special-needs and African American students; as a result, they recruited these students into their classrooms to the point where they had re-segregated them. Hence, Falls River, through its relatively weak commitment to an overarching vision of pedagogy and due to some strongly held beliefs about teaching and specific populations, was somewhat weakened in its dominant response to student diversity.

**Schools that Tended Towards Differentiated Student Experiences.** Teachers at schools that tended towards the differentiation of student experiences did not express strong beliefs about specific forms of pedagogical practice. In addition, they tended to react first to what made children different from one another.

The primary concern at Sumpter was for children's socio-emotional well being. The school's emphasis on affect and on maintaining children's cultural heritages over-rode all other concerns, including academics which were relegated to the background. The school saw itself as a multicultural family that children belonged to, where they could feel safe, loved, and accepted. And in fact, Sumpter was a safe, warm, and loving place to be.

Sumpter valued having a diversified staff with strengths in a variety of cross-cultural and artistic areas. There was an entrepreneurial spirit as teachers developed new ideas to try in their classes and sought funding to develop these different programs. The school would try to match students, based on their different learning styles, to each teacher's strengths and areas of expertise.

Winema's staff shared a common sensitivity to student diversity. But also, while individuals at Winema may have held strong beliefs about equity and student diversity, the school as a whole seemed not to have developed common and shared notions on these topics. There was much variation among teachers at Winema on how they discussed issues of student diversity with the CORS site visit tem. Also, many staff seemed to believe that not all students were capable of engaging in independent learning as was called for in its programs; hence, they developed the broad range of programs that would help such students. Winema's concerns seemed driven by its rapidly expanding student population and how that population was changing; neither of these issues would seem to lend themselves to an immediate questioning of the curriculum or to the school's making an overarching commitment to new forms of pedagogy.

**Both: Commonality and Differentiation.** As noted above, Lamar seemed to fit into both categories. Its emphasis on providing students with common experiences seemed to be equally balanced by its efforts to differentiate those experiences. Similarly to Winema, individuals on Lamar's staff showed much sensitivity to issues of student diversity; and also as in the case of Winema, Lamar's staff seemed to lack a shared vocabulary for expressing these concerns. What seemed to keep Lamar from responding to student diversity by differentiating its programs, as did Winema, was that Lamar staff had a strong commitment to its thematic, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based curriculum. This strong commitment to a particular form of pedagogy was countered by the Lamar-staff's belief that not all students were capable of the independent forms of inquiry and study that this curriculum demanded.

**Structural Features**

**Schools the Tended Towards Common Student Experiences.** Beyond their

commitment to an overarching vision of pedagogical practice and to their students' holistic well-being, Ashley, Careen, Falls River, Eldorado, and Humboldt had strong leadership and support for their efforts to build internal capacity that would be responsive to student diversity. At Falls River and Humboldt, the previous principals had provided strong leadership in responding to student diversity; the current principal continued to provide that leadership at Humboldt. At Ashley, Careen, Eldorado, and Humboldt, additional leadership in support of the school's pedagogical vision and its response to student diversity was also provided by teachers.

All five schools were also trying to build their internal capacity to respond to student diversity in various ways. At some schools, staff engaged in self-study on important, agreed-upon issues. School staff participated in inservice training and professional development around common concerns including topics such as teaching methods, cross-cultural communication and student discipline. Teachers were often encouraged to team, across grades and speciality areas. Also at some of the schools, there were ongoing efforts to hire minority staff.

**Schools that Tended Towards Differentiating Student Experiences.** At Sumpter, leadership and support are provided in the direction of teachers developing their own interests. Winema's large size, the Principal's belief that diversification of programs is the proper response to student diversity, and his otherwise mixed messages on the nature of the school's restructuring efforts contributed to the ever increasing number of options and programs for the school's diverse student populations. In spite of this ever-growing set of programs, at least one teacher commented on "kids who fall through the cracks," due to Winema's size.

**Both: Commonality and Differentiation.** Lamar's efforts tended towards the ongoing development of its innovative programs. While staff may have been concerned about student

diversity, this did not seem to translate into specific capacity building activity on the school's part.

## DISCUSSION

While all eight schools faced some common issues involving student diversity, they also faced some unique challenges based on their individual contexts. It might be tempting to generalize across common issues and to gloss over what was unique about each of these schools. Yet there seemed to be an organic feel to each school's situation. That is, to ignore a school's unique challenges would mean that we would also lose some important information that would help us understand how that school reacts to student diversity.

Each school reacted to student diversity by balancing between responses that would result in increased differentiation of student experiences with responses that would provide for commonality of experiences. We were able to classify five schools as having dominant responses that tended towards the provision of common student experiences. In one case, that response was in spite of the school's original formation which was intended to provide differentiated experiences; and in another case, the provision of common experiences was somewhat diluted by the practices of three groups of teachers which resulted in the partial separation of identifiable groups of children. In two cases, the school's dominant academic response was to provide differentiated student experiences. And in one case, we were unable to make an unambiguous determination.

Schools that tended towards providing common student experiences also tended to have a firm commitment to a vision of ambitious pedagogy and to its students in the sense of accepting some responsibility for their cultural, social, physical, and intellectual well being—i.e., to the

"whole child." In addition, these schools had strong leadership and engaged in efforts to build their capacity to respond to their students diverse needs within a common framework. The one school that had made a commitment to full inclusion (i.e., common student experiences), but also experienced some significant differentiation of student experiences did not have a strong commitment to some overarching vision of pedagogy nor did it have strong leadership supporting any particular view of teaching.

The staff of one school whose dominant response was differentiation of students' academic experiences were so firmly committed to the socio-emotional and cultural well being of their students that academics were relegated to the background. This school lacked any overarching commitment to pedagogy; and its program development efforts were focussed on developing the individual interests and skills of its teachers so that they could better match the diversity of their student population. The other school whose dominant response was differentiation valued individual initiative, common-sense approaches to teaching, and had not developed a shared meaning about equity. Its principal valued multiple programs as a response to student diversity, in part due to the size of the school. There was no clear leadership and understanding across the school on what restructuring actually meant to the school.

The school which could not be classified as having a dominant response to student diversity had a strong commitment to ambitious pedagogy, but while individuals had some strong views about student diversity, it had not developed shared meanings about equity (or even, diversity) and some of its staff felt that not all students are capable of independent work.

Our results suggest that, even though elementary schools try to balance between differentiation and the provision of common experiences as a response to student diversity, the

balance does often tilt in one or another direction. Moreover, the balance will tilt to create a dominant response that supports providing common experiences to all students only when the school adopts pedagogical practices that, to some extent, depart from conventional practice, when school staff share values about pedagogy and about the student as a whole person, when the school's leadership supports those values, and when the school engages in capacity-building efforts to address student diversity among its regular education programs. Our results further suggest that schools which lack any of these conditions are likely to tilt in the direction of providing programs which differentiate student experiences.

These were restructured elementary schools. As a result, they had access to resources, high visibility, and reputations as innovators. The five magnet schools had specialized missions which provided access to even more resources and made it more likely that they would develop a coherent, overarching pedagogical vision. Insofar as conventional elementary schools vary in their commitments to pedagogy and to the whole child; insofar as their leadership is diffuse or focused elsewhere; and insofar as they fail to engage in capacity building around issues of diversity, we speculate that they would tend towards differentiated responses to student diversity.

As a practical thought experiment, it helps to hypothesize what might happen in the event that the larger district or some other external agency imposed a program on one of these schools where the intent of that program was to address issues of student diversity. Our results suggest that, after the shock of such an imposition wore off, these schools would respond differently. Ashley, Careen, Eldorado, and Humboldt would try to adapt that mandate so that their core programs remained undifferentiated. If the staff at those schools saw the externally imposed program as oppositional to their pedagogical vision or as predicated on ignoring the needs of the

whole child, we predict that those four schools would very likely oppose the program in question. In the case of Falls River, we doubt that any external program which called for the extreme differentiation of student experiences would have much of a chance of acceptance; the school's memories of life before inclusion are too vivid and too negative. If an external program with an academic focus might result in children experiencing some trauma, we predict that Sumpter's staff would adapt the program by neutralizing its focus or they resist its implementation as not right for their children.

Finally, our results suggest some ways by which schools might try to consciously move their response to student diversity in one direction or another. These would involve creating some sort of normative values about pedagogical practices and about diversity, the exertion of leadership by either the principal or a group of teachers, and the support of efforts to develop the school's internal ability to respond to diversity.

## ENDNOTES

1. The term "restructured" conveys the mistaken impression that the schools in question have finished working on and therefore have achieved something—that is, they have restructured. In fact, restructuring is a long term, ongoing process (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). However, the term "restructuring" is awkward and not widely used. With the caveat that the schools in question are engaged in an ongoing process, we adopt the term "restructured" as a *façon de parler*.

2. As noted earlier, due to individual variation in student characteristics, we would expect teachers and other school personnel to adapt their actions to individual differences. This is not what we are referring to when we write about the differentiation and/or commonality of student experiences. One way of thinking about the distinction is that (a) student experiences are differentiated when those experiences are correlated to some kind of student demographic characteristic and (b) they are common when the correlation is zero or at chance. This distinction allows for *individual* variation.

3. Because our analysis locates commonality and differentiation *within* the school, it avoids the *across-school* issue of whether *all* schools should provide a common set of experiences in order to develop a common core of cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987) among students.

4. In spite of these exceptions in Falls Rivers' inclusion program, we do not wish to minimize the extent of their efforts. Prior to implementing full inclusion, Falls River had a very small gifted and talented pull-out program and very large pull-out programs in bilingual education, Chapter 1 reading, and special education. One categorical teacher commented that children seemed to spend more time out of the classroom than in it and that, as a result, regular

classroom teachers would burn out and leave because they could not plan a coherent program for their children. Full inclusion resulted in the teaming of regular education and categorically-funded, certified specialist teachers who worked in pairs or in larger-sized groups. The extent to which children received all categorical and special service *in* their regular classrooms deeply impressed the site-visit team.

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Table 1. Demographic data on the CORS School Restructuring Study elementary schools

| School | Location | Grades | # of Teachers | # of Students* | % Free/r Lunch | Race/Ethnicity % | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Caucasian | African American | Hispanic | Asian American | American Indian | Other |
| Ashley Elementary | urban | K-5 | 39 | 650 | 36 | 66 | 34 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Careen Elementary | urban | K-5 | 18 | 300 | 37 | 44 | 29 | 22 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Falls River Elementary | urban | K-5 | 31 | 450 | 82 | 6 | 9 | 79 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| El Dorado Elementary | urban | K-5 | 22 | 350 | 70 | 15 | 22 | 63 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Humboldt Elementary | urban | K-5 | 44 | 1,000 | 87 | 12 | 5 | 78 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Lamar Elementary | urban | K-6 | 12 | 400 | 26 | 40 | 25 | 18 | 14 | 2 | 1 |
| Sumpter Elementary | small urban | K-6 | 36 | 600 | 69 | 35 | 0 | 65 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Winema Elementary | urban | K-5 | 57 | 1,250 | 11 | 84 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

* rounded to the nearest 50

Table 2. Schools' academic responses to student diversity

| School Name | Responses that Would Differentiate Student Experiences | Responses that Would Create Common Student Experiences |
|---|---|---|
| Ashley* | Operated a state-mandated gifted and talented track of self-contained classrooms where the student-teacher ratio was lower than for regular classes; IEPs for gifted students; Reading Recovery for first graders who fell behind in reading, remedial reading programs for others; 1 third-grade teacher followed her at-risk students to fourth grade; 2 self-contained, cross-grade classes for at-risk students | Non-academic activities combined all students; equally high-quality instruction ***was*** provided to students across programs |
| Careen* | Student portfolios judged by standards of student growth; voluntary inter-session workshops for at-risk and for gifted students | Thematic, project-driven curriculum for all students; special needs students received support in the classroom; regular classroom teachers adapted instructional strategies for ESL, special-needs, and other students within the regular classroom setting; minimum requirements for passing state test |
| Falls River* | Special after-school and inter-session academic and cultural programs for different types of categorical students; as a result of the teachers' lobbying within the African-American community, one 4/5th grade team enrolled a disproportionate number of African American students in its classroom; as a result of aggressively seeking out special needs students, one 4/5th grade team enrolled a disproportionate number of such students in its classroom; self-contained, special-education primary-grade class; heavy emphasis on experiential learning with long field trips in one 4/5th grade team | All students--Chapter 1, bilingual, special needs--were included in regular classroom settings |
| Eldorado* | Some pull-out ESL and Chapter 1 math programs; primary children were first taught to read in their native/stronger languages; implementation of thematic instruction varied among teachers | All students enrolled in alternate-day, English-Spanish bilingual program; anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-class curriculum organized around four school-wide themes (1 per quarter); thematic curriculum; whole language; most Chapter 1 services provided in the classroom |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lamar[c] | Mixed-age mixed-grade student clusters where teachers developed their own curricula; large pull-out gifted and smaller special education (LD) programs; individualization of instruction; counseling of parents to remove students who were not "ready to learn independently" | Thematic, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based curricula; heterogenous assignment of students to clusters and within classes |
| Humboldt[c] | Some individual teachers followed same group of students for 2 or 3 years; K-3, self-contained developmental bilingual program; teachers created different kinds of teams, for instance, a 1-5 team where fifth graders helped first graders learn to read; curriculum and teaching focused on students' learning styles. | Heterogenous grouping of all students within the school; pull-out services were rare; ESL teachers provided individual support within the classroom and sometimes taught lessons to the whole class; adoption of a mathematics curriculum series that departed from conventional treatment of content |
| Sumpter[a] | Self-contained bilingual education classroom at every grade; broad range of teacher generated projects (life histories & family tree; art) | Inclusion where special education teachers teamed with regular classroom teachers |
| Winema[b] | Individualized, self paced program within the school; self-contained alternative education classes for at-risk 4th and 5th graders; pull-out special education and gifted & talented programs; homogenous reading groups within classes; student placement with specific teachers who "seems to work well with that kind of child"; many different programs for students such as tutorial, peer tutor, and adult-volunteers to listen and/or work with specific or groups of students | Thinking skills curriculum; same curriculum used in alternative education classes as in rest of school; cooperative learning |

[a] Dominant response to student diversity was to provide common student experiences.
[b] Dominant response to student diversity was to provide differentiated student experiences.
[c] Could not determine dominant response to student diversity.

Table 3. Schools' normative beliefs and values, and organizational features that supported dominant responses to student diversity

| School Name | Normative Beliefs and Values | Organizational Features |
|---|---|---|
| Ashley* | Felt need to do whatever was necessary to help all students in the school succeed; concern for serving the needs of the whole child and accepting that child where she or he is at; tacit agreement among faculty not to discuss equity issues raised by *de facto* segregation of students due to tracks | Regular program received additional funds from local sources to equalize it with the gifted program which received extra state monies; other, non-fiscal resources and opportunities were shared across programs; teachers had self-study groups with common cross-grade foci: whole language and student expectations for K-2, student self-concept for 3-5 |
| Careen* | Strong belief that thematic, project driven curriculum is the best way to teach most, if not all, students; students seen as independent learners; strong belief that to be fair, assessment should be focused on student growth | Efforts to increase faculty awareness about cultural differences; faculty training in counseling; content-based efforts to teach English as a second language; efforts to recruit diverse faculty; Leadership: founders insisted school be open to all students; explicit teaching of communication skills to students; students not retained in grades; consideration of student uniforms to down play SES differences among students; Choice: parents choose to send children to the school; students exerted some choices, for example, over what to place in their portfolios |
| Falls River* | Shared commitment by most teachers to full inclusion of all students; "zero-tolerance" for ethnic and racial slurs | Strong leadership by previous principal; flexible teaming of mainstream with categorical (Chapter 1, bilingual, special education) teachers |
| Eldorado* | Celebration and assertive promotion of diversity in school; belief that students face challenges in real life and that school is to prepare them for those challenges; teachers' shared political agendas; accountability felt to students and their parents | Leadership of founding teachers with a progressive educational agenda; recruitment of teachers with similar values and beliefs; high amounts of parental participation; efforts to recruit African American teachers who are bilingual; grade-level teams |
| Lamar* | Sensitivity to issues of student diversity; strong commitment to thematic, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based curriculum; belief that some students cannot handle independent learning; no real shared conversation about equity as related to student diversity | Racial quotas: the school was to be 60% minority |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Humboldt[a] | Belief in high expectations, relevant curricula, stimulating instruction for all students; drill and practice remediation was out of favor; "teachers are responsible for teaching; students, for learning;" students respect each other; recognition that students face challenges in later life and belief school is to prepare them to face those challenges; teachers who do not show concern for students' welfare were ostracized | Principal's leadership; priority in teaching assignments was given to teachers who followed students into the next grade; flexible teacher teaming |
| Sumpter[b] | Entrepreneurial culture where teachers pursued own interests; concern for student self-concept and affect; school is a family that children belong to—they should feel safe, loved, and accepted; value a diversified staff who would be able to provide a broad set of services to every child; focus on the whole child where the stress on affect over-rode academic concerns; preserve the children's cultural identities. | Students matched to teachers based on student learning styles and teacher strengths |
| Winema[b] | Much individual sensitivity to issues of student diversity; individual initiative valued; no real shared conversation about equity as related to student diversity; tacitly, shared assumptions about "common sense" ways of teaching with little room for questioning; leadership's belief that multiple programs was best response | School, class, and faculty size; lack of clear leadership; parent pressure could be exerted through district and school level decision-making committees |

[a] Dominant response to student diversity was to provide common experiences.
[b] Dominant response to student diversity was to provide differentiated experiences.
[c] Could not determine dominant response to student diversity